

# Fake News or Marketing Bonanza?

## Exploring Non-Traditional “Holidays” as Sales Stimuli

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### Foundational Information – Non-Traditional Holidays

Did you know that September 29, 2017 was National Coffee Day? Starbucks did. The company used this day to celebrate the farmers and communities that grow coffee all over the world, and put its money where its mouth is with a full page ad in The Wall Street Journal valued at \$248,000. Starbucks didn’t choose to build a consumer promotion around National Coffee Day, but many of its competitors did, creating numerous opportunities for consumers to join in the celebration. Dunkin Donuts offered a buy-one-get-one-free deal on any medium sized coffee. Cumberland Farms required texting for a free coffee coupon on National Coffee Day, and then also provided free coffee for the next four Fridays. Krispy Kreme extended National Coffee Day to National Coffee “Weekend,” providing a free hot or iced coffee in any size to everyone who came by – and best of all, no purchase was necessary. Even non-coffee companies found ways to tap into the power of this non-traditional holiday. Through a partnership arrangement, Lyft gave out free cans of High Brew cold-brewed coffee to riders in several large US markets. The holiday was amplified via social media through #NationalCoffeeDay.

Coffee has been celebrated with its own “day” since as early as 1983 in a promotion by the Japan Coffee Association. In the US, the first public promotion of National Coffee Day was in 2005. More recently, “International Coffee Day” was organized in 2014 as part of Milan’s food-focused Expo 2015.

Another non-traditional holiday that has received significant publicity is National Pancake Day, February 27. Since 2006, International House of Pancakes (IHop) has promoted the day and invited guests to each enjoy two free pancakes – while helping the company support charities in the communities where it operates. So far, the promotion has resulted in contributions exceeding \$16 million. Pancake Day has historical significance dating back hundreds of years as Shrove Tuesday, a day celebrated in the United Kingdom on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, the start of lent. Even to current times, people celebrate by going to confession to be “shriven” of their sins, and then use up their eggs and fats before commencing a Lenten fast. Pancakes are seen as an ideal way to make the best use of those ingredients.

Even small businesses have found ways to build promotions based on non-traditional holidays. The Spa at Norwich Inn celebrates Sisters Day, the first Sunday in August, with a Sisters Spa Getaway Deal. In addition to spa treatments, add-ons, also at reduced rates, include special tasting sessions from New England vineyards – “for sisters who like wine.”

There are over 1,500 “national days,” as represented by several online calendars that attempt to keep track of them. These are often referred to as “fake holidays” or at least “non-traditional” holidays. Such holidays are distant cousins of “official” holidays, with no official governance, and just about anyone can establish a national day for any product, service, or cause that they like.

Another interesting fact: National Puppy Day is March 23, and coincides with UB’s Faculty Research Day.

### What About the Impact on Sales/Revenue?

Our research has focused on creating a general understanding about scores of non-traditional holidays - how they came about, how they are celebrated, and the businesses behind them. While some non-traditional holidays are receiving significant publicity, their actual influence on sales is not clear. The next step in this research effort will focus on some key questions with the intent of creating a better understanding of the

results obtained from using non-traditional holidays as a basis of promotional marketing activities. As marketers continue to search for new and better ways to drive traffic and stimulate sales/revenue, creating further understanding of this topic can positively influence plans and foster new revenue growth opportunities.

### Questions That Will Drive Further Research

The following questions will be part of a one-on-one interview process contacting a number of companies that are known to have used non-traditional holidays in their promotional marketing endeavors. Each interview will build on all the information amassed up until that point. Each will address the challenges and opportunities for marketers.

- Where does a company learn about non-traditional holidays – either in its own industry or in an industry where a potential partnership might be pursued? We know that industry associations are active in providing ideas and tools to member organizations relative to official holidays. For example, it’s typical for automobile dealerships to receive tools like “The 4<sup>th</sup> of July” campaign package from the the brands each dealership sells. Likewise, it’s typical for the Milk Board to create promotions based on official holidays and to create buy-in opportunities for various milk brands. But it’s not clear if non-traditional holidays are treated the same by associations. Does Teleflora or Florists Transworld Delivery (FTD) provide florists with promotional advice for National Tulip Day (January 20)?

- Do these promotions actually make money, driving sales/revenue for the brands that sponsor them? Some companies like to fill a calendar with promotions to keep their brands top-of-mind with consumers. As such there may not be revenue goals associated with these promotions, but rather goals of awareness building, generating goodwill, etc. Other companies work from a perspective that every promotional activity needs to at least pay for itself, and ideally result in a profit. Where do non-traditional holidays fit in this differentiated approach?

- Do non-traditional holidays resonate with consumers, encouraging them to participate in such promotions and actually spend more overall? Or do they simply divert already planned purchases into the promotional periods. This is a continuing dilemma for marketers as it is often difficult to know whether the customer would have made a purchase anyway or if the promotion truly influenced the purchase decision.

### Next Steps

After receiving IRB approval, telephone interviews will begin. Once data received is compiled and analyzed, our planned output will be a publishable article as well as a “play book” for companies looking to expand their promotional activities via non-traditional holidays. We’ll address companies and industries where such promotions have the greatest effect, and those where it may not be such a great idea.

Our plan is to also create a clearinghouse for best-practice marketing strategies and tactics, while promoting a greater understanding of the opportunities and constraints afforded by using non-traditional holidays as part of a marketing plan.

